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ABSTRACT

The Texas Scholars Program uses business and community involvement to motivate middle- and lower-ranked high school students to take and complete a rigorous academic curriculum to prepare them for the labor market or postsecondary education. The paper examines variables such as staff development, community involvement, support from the central office, and ways these contribute to a successful program. The focus is on the high expectations required of students by the Greater Longview Organization of Business and Education program which was initiated by a company seeking trained workers for its craft-type jobs. The Texas Scholars Program emphasizes businesspeople coming to the schools and to tell eighth graders what life is like outside school. Parents are involved, too, as they cooperate and communicate with teachers. Educators provide guidance to students and parents as students select courses. A number of student incentives, such as discount cards to local businesses, are part of the program. An appraisal of the program's effectiveness shows that classes like chemistry, computer science, and trigonometry have dramatically increased their enrollments. (Contains 31 references.) (RJM)

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TEXAS SCHOLARS: SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS AND LINKAGES

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Abstract

The Texas Scholars program, originally developed in 1989 in Longview, Texas, was adopted by the Texas Business and Education Coalition in 1992 for statewide development and endorsed that same year by the Texas State Board of Education. In 1993, it was the springboard for the establishment of the new "Recommended High School Program" for the State of Texas. It is a practical, low-cost, high-impact program that requires business and community involvement. The program is designed to motivate middle- and lower-ranked high school students to take and complete a rigorous academic curriculum to prepare them for the labor market or for postsecondary education.

Texas Scholars: Successful Partnerships and Linkages

Never before has there been such a rich literature about educational health and productivity, nor has there been such a public and professional awareness of that literature. Policymakers and practitioners alike are keenly interested in propositions pertaining to educational productivity. In this context, it was Ronald Edmonds' (1979) study of effective schools that launched the effective schools movement in the United States. He identified two groups of variables that were very important in effective schools: The organizational and structural variables, and the process variables. Garcia (1994) noted that these two groups of variables essentially define the climate and culture of a school. Organizational and structural variables include schoolwide recognition of academic success, parental support and involvement, curriculum planning and organization, instructional leadership, district support, staff development, and school site management. Edmonds defined process variables as those factors that function to sustain high student expectations, a productive school climate, including collaborative planning and collegial relationships, a sense of community, clear goals, and order and discipline.

Edmonds clearly helped to standardize the effective schools' work and to focus the domain of inquiry. Since his description of the "correlates" of effective schools, researchers have worked to refine and expand them. Purkey and Smith (1985) compiled their body of data on effective school practices, identifying the following characteristics of effective schools: Teacher expectations (teachers maintain high achievement expectations for all their students); regular feedback (continual feedback on academic progress is provided to students and parents);

administrative leadership (effective principals are actively engaged in curriculum planning, program and staff development, and instructional issues); emphasis on basic skills (teachers focus on reading, writing, math, and language arts); and school climate (there is a safe, orderly environment).

Numerous other researchers have identified variables such as staff development, community involvement, support from the central office, stability of staff, and resources directed at achieving school goals (Greenfield, 1987). One can also refer to the research and writings of Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schwietzer, and Wisenbaker (1979); Clark, Lotto, and Astuto (1984); Mackenzie (1983); Purkey and Smith (1983); and Rosenholtz (1985). Carter and Chatfield (1986) and Garcia (1994) have reported similar statistics in effective elementary schools serving Mexican-American, African American, and Asian students in California.

When Codianni and Wilburn (1983) compared the findings of 17 major studies on effective schools, they identified six recurring themes: High student expectations, continuous assessment of learning, systematic staff development, strong leadership, positive school climate, and emphasis on basic skills. Researchers at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) divided the roles of the effective principal into an interrelated set of content strands (Blum, Butler, & Olson, 1987) that included monitoring school performance, building a vision for the school, creating a positive school climate and culture, implementing the curriculum, and improving instruction.

The United States Department of Education (1993) recently published material noting several components of an effective school. These characteristics included high expectations, strong instructional leadership, strong instructional focus, positive school climate, and a system

for monitoring and measuring students. The effective schools movement was a major force in education during the 1980's, and it continues to exert a great influence in the 1990's. The importance of having educational standards with accountability and strong building-level leadership are still recognized as very important (Webb, Metha, & Jordan, 1992). The implications for high expectations are in all these studies. Clearly, strong educational standards are a key element in effective schools.

High Expectations for Students

Throughout the 1980's and into the 1990's, the authors and their associates have reported the findings of various studies subsumed within the effective schools domain (Johnson & Snyder, 1986, 1988, 1989-1990, 1992; Johnson, Snyder, & Anderson, 1992; Johnson, Snyder, Anderson, & Johnson, 1997; Johnson, Snyder, & Johnson, 1992, 1994; and Snyder, Anderson, & Johnson, 1992). These references represent a sampling of articles in this domain that the authors have published in the past few years.

Overall, we have looked carefully at areas identified as important in the organizational productivity and effective schools literature. In all of our studies in Texas and nationwide, strong educational standards continually have been rated in the top areas of assessed needs. There is no question that the findings of these studies show that educators nationwide perceive high teacher expectations for students and regular feedback are valued as extremely important. Overall, we found that those surveyed were clearly desirous of developing and expanding school programs.

However the question immediately arises about how schools can develop and implement academic program development for all students. For example, there is a clear need for programs designed to motivate middle and lower-ranked high school students to complete a rigorous academic curriculum to prepare them for postsecondary education or for the labor market. Might a possible approach for such program development be to link business and education?

The American public sees a gap between what businesses do for schools and what they should do. Only ten percent feel that companies are doing enough, according to a recent national survey conducted by Roper Starch Worldwide (Speer, 1994). But there is a program that has won praise across Texas and, subsequently, has been adopted by the Texas State Board of Education as a model program that has connected schools with the community and the world of work. The Texas Scholars program represents an important immediate step that educators and their community can take together to improve their schools. The program is an excellent first step in building community support for world-class schools.

The story began in 1989. Joe Randolph was a Longview, Texas, school board member and manager of the training department for the Texas Eastman Division of the Eastman Chemical Company that occupies a 5,800 acre site outside Longview and employs nearly 3,000 people. In his previous position as Personnel Director at Texas Eastman, Mr. Randolph was continually challenged to locate high school graduates who were qualified for Eastman's craft-type jobs.

Following a community-wide Business/Education Summit in 1989, Mr. Randolph and Mary Alice Schmitz, principal of Longview's Forest Park Middle School, were named as co-chairs of the Curriculum Committee of the Greater Longview Organization of Business and Education (GLOBE). The two subsequently led the effort to develop a pilot program that was a partnership

of educators and local businesses. The program, known as GLOBE Scholars, was fully implemented for high school students during the 1990-1991 school year. The GLOBE Scholars program, synonymous with Texas Scholars, encourages, supports, and rewards students for taking a challenging course load designed to prepare them for the job market and advanced educational opportunities. The program stresses the importance of good communication skills as well as the benefits of taking academically challenging math and science offerings (Texas Education News, 1991).

Adopted in 1992 by the Texas Business and Education Coalition, Texas Scholars was endorsed that same year by the State Board of Education by a vote of 15-0. Also during 1992, it was featured in a news special produced by KHTV Channel 39 in Houston. During most of 1993, Mr. Randolph worked tirelessly to use the Texas Scholars curriculum as a springboard for the establishment of a new statewide curriculum for Texas high school students. In November, the long-awaited "New Recommended High School Program" became a reality when passed by the State Board of Education. Texas Scholars is now the prime incentive vehicle statewide for students to complete this curriculum (Grove, 1998; Tucker, 1997).

Major focus is directed toward those students in the middle and lower range of the class rank, the so-called "forgotten majority," who heretofore have had little chance of being given any scholastic recognition. Many of the students in this category are minorities, and progress is already being seen in this critically important area. Course grade requirements are a "C" or better (emphasis on "better"). Students do not have to have a C average to get in the program, but they must maintain a C average to stay in the program. Students are welcome to enter the program anytime during their high school career as long as they meet the requirements for the program.

However, their junior year would be the latest time they could realistically complete the program requirements; even then, they would have to "double up" on courses their junior year and probably attend summer school. Generally, if a student were just two courses behind, he or she could enter the program at the beginning of the junior year; however, if a student were behind more than two courses, it would be practically impossible to enter the program past the junior year. The real commitment should be made at the end of the eighth grade.

The commitment to the Scholars Program is made at the time the students sign up for their freshman classes. This is usually during the spring semester of the eighth grade within six-to-eight weeks prior to being promoted to the ninth grade. Students are encouraged, but not required, to sign contracts. Approximately one-third of the 149 school districts in Texas where the program has been adopted have parents and students both sign an "I-Promise Document" declaring the student will make grades of 70% or better and stay with the program (an increasing number of schools are adopting 75% as a minimum passing grade). The commitment is expressed by signing up for the classes specified by the Scholars core and by agreeing to maintain at least a C average throughout all four years of high school. Students must maintain passing grades in all their classes. If a student earns a grade below 70, he or she can retake the class and have the higher grade recorded as the program grade. If a student were dropped from the program because of unsatisfactory grades, the student could be readmitted to the program if the grade earned in each class were raised to 70 or above.

The Texas Scholars Program

Business leaders in the community introduce eighth-grade students to the Texas Scholars Program by a slide presentation just prior to the students registering for freshman high school classes. Occasionally, a similar presentation is given to their parents. The key is business people coming to the schools and telling eighth graders what life is like outside school. These business leaders talk to the students about economic issues, particularly global competition (Dempsey, 1991). They strongly urge students to complete a rigorous academic curriculum so they are prepared for further education and for the work force (Texas Business and Education Coalition Highlights, 1992). Business leaders show them what it costs to live and demonstrate how difficult it is to live on a minimum wage. They tell students "there are no good jobs for dummies anymore." These 50-minute presentations by business and industry leaders emphasize the relationship between education and the ability to succeed in college or the work force. Business has played a crucial role in making Texas Scholars a success. Students expect teachers to tell them math and science are important, but when they hear it from business leaders who don't pull any punches about the relationship of those courses to good jobs, it puts school in a different light.

Business leaders can be involved by providing presentations to the eighth graders, contributing financially, and/or serving on committees to implement the program (preferably all three). The Scholars Program is not a large financial investment. Major funding is for brochures and certificates, for an annual senior recognition dinner, and for an employer directory of scholars. In most communities, the yearly budget is less than $10,000. Some businesses may choose not to provide financial assistance, but supply human resources instead for any of the several committees that support the program.

Parents support, encourage, and provide a "you can do it" attitude. They cooperate and communicate with teachers and can be involved in the Scholars Program by serving on one or more of the committees that support the Scholars Program.

Educators provide guidance to students and parents as they select courses initially and in subsequent years. Educators have the responsibility of determining if students are meeting the requirements for recognition on a yearly basis, and for designating those seniors who receive the honor of being called a "Scholar". Encouragement and support from educators plays a vital role in the success of the program.

A high school senior counselor monitors the students' grades on each campus to insure that the students are certified to be in the program. The school counselors are the official custodians of the rules for the program. A relatively new development is a Texas Scholars Tracking Committee in several of the communities that have adopted the program. The committee is composed of team educators (selected high school faculty) and business people who monitor the Scholars' and non-Scholars' test scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test, the ACT, and the SAT.

The Scholars Program in each community is generally managed by an overall coordinating committee of educators and business leaders. However, individuals from the service sector of the community such as Junior League, Junior Achievement, and the PTA have provided valuable resources and service.

Although the Scholars Program is oriented toward all students, it particularly encourages the middle-ability students to raise their expectations (Avery, 1994). The curriculum includes four years of English, algebra one and two, geometry, precalculus or trigonometry/elementary

analysis, world history, world geography, United States history, and government/economics. Students must take three science classes from a list of seven that vary from physical science to physics two. Other required credits include foreign language, fine arts, health, physical education, computer science, speech, and tech-prep or college-prep electives. The 24-credit Recommended High School Program, adopted in 1993 by the Texas State Board of Education, is designed to motivate all students to succeed, not just the 10 to 25 percent of students who are already taking this curriculum.

Student Incentives

As of October 1, 1997, the Scholars Program had spread to 149 school districts in 63 Texas communities from virtually every major region of the state. Business leaders continue to provide local support through various incentives. For example, in many Texas communities, students who fulfill program requirements by maintaining passing grades in specified subjects receive discount cards honored by dozens of local businesses. Scholars present their "Honor Cards" at businesses to receive freebies or discounts of 10 to 20 percent.

If the students keep the agreement each year through their senior year, they are honored at an annual ceremony and banquet. A Texas Scholars directory is also distributed to local businesses encouraging them to hire these graduates for summer, part-time, and regular work. Students are frequently featured in newspapers and at ceremonies that spotlight their hard work in tough classes.

Appraising the Program's Effectiveness

Dr. R.L. McMichael, Longview I.S.D. superintendent, commented: "We may have gone a long time without encouraging young people to take a rigorous curriculum, and a few parents have fallen into that trap as well. We've allowed our young people to just sort of coast through high school, taking the least amount of academic core curriculum that they could to graduate and go on to college. In years past, those young people were successful, but we're coming to a juncture now where we realize that's no longer the case. We take representatives from business and bring them into our schools to tell our students first hand what they need." This approach certainly appears to be successful.

Average students taking advanced math and science courses aren't unusual anymore in any of Longview's five school districts. Classes like chemistry, computer science, and trigonometry have grown dramatically since the Texas Scholars Program was begun seven years ago.

Texas Scholars was a big success in all Longview school districts after just one year of the program. At the Pine Tree High School, 60 percent of the junior class signed up for chemistry. Hallsville I.S.D. added a math teacher and a science teacher; Spring Hill added an algebra teacher. The district also saw a big increase in chemistry enrollment. White Oak I.S.D. added courses in algebra one, chemistry two, and plans to add calculus. At Longview High School, 67 percent more students registered for physics, and 36 percent more seniors signed up for pre-calculus, calculus, and trigonometry. The changes weren't expensive. As math and science teachers were hired, demand for other classes dropped, particularly those classified as "Below Track Level."

Fredericksburg I.S.D. superintendent, Dr. Marc Williamson, noted the immediate success of the program. Furthermore, he commented that he wasn't required to go to the board and ask for large sums of money to implement the program.

Mary Alice Schmitz, principal of Forest Park Middle School, and co-founder of the program, stated: "We have almost been overwhelmed with the success of the program. I have students who attended my middle school who are now students at Longview High School. They come back and tell me that during their sophomore year they're doubling up on math courses such as geometry and algebra two so they can take calculus their senior year. We find that many of our students have really latched hold of the program, and many of our minority students have set higher academic expectations

Business employers around the state are actively seeking students with the Texas Scholar designation on their resumes. Employers are also hiring juniors and seniors in the programs for summer employment. When job openings arise, Texas Scholars are receiving the more lucrative jobs. Companies across Texas are supporting the program. The list of corporate sponsors is growing rapidly. Texas Scholars has succeeded in bringing business and education together to work toward the common goal of preparing high school graduates for a better future.

Dr. Lionel "Skip" Meno, former Commissioner of the Texas Education Agency, commented that the Scholars Program is being adopted across the state. He further noted that the Texas Scholars-Recommended High School Program initiative has caused more change in the Texas schools than any other reform introduced in recent years. He commented that the program represents an important immediate step that educators and their community can take together to improve their schools. "It does not require changes in law or regulation or major changes in

program or curriculum. It is flexible and can be tailored to local conditions. The Texas Scholars program is not a fix-all. No program is, but it is an excellent first step to building community support for world-class schools. The Texas Scholars Program is worthy of consideration by every community."

Dr. Mike Moses, Commissioner of the Texas Education Agency, was instrumental in launching Texas Scholars in Lubbock, Texas, during his tenure as superintendent of the Lubbock Independent School District. He also helped promote implementation of the Texas Scholars Program in other West Texas communities. As Texas Education Commissioner, Dr. Moses is giving his strong support toward continuing the Texas Scholars-Recommended High School Program initiative.

The increased student demand for a solid academic program is causing high school officials to add classes in science, math, and foreign language, recruit more teachers for those subjects, institute block scheduling, lengthen the school day, and make other changes to strengthen their academic offerings. To prepare students for the Recommended Program, districts are improving instruction in those subjects at the elementary and middle school levels. Bottom-line results are encouraging. Early studies show that students in the Scholars Program score higher, in many cases significantly higher, than other students on the TAAS and college-entrance tests.

The Texas Scholars Program has succeeded in bringing business and education together to work toward the common goal of preparing high school graduates for a better future. The program not only makes students winners in the classroom and starts them on the road to success, but it reaches teens who might otherwise have never considered a more challenging academic program. Thousands of "regular" students who previously planned to complete only minimal

graduation requirements are now planning to become Texas Scholars by studying rigorous courses in science, math, and language arts (including foreign language).

In December of 1997, GTE Corporation, impressed with the remarkable success of Texas Scholars, awarded a $50,000 grant to the Texas Business and Education Coalition to assist in expanding the program and carrying it to a higher level of awareness throughout Texas, as well as other states.

Post Script - On a purely volunteer basis, Joe Randolph has traveled thousands of miles making presentations to business and education coalitions throughout Texas. On Friday November 11, 1994, Mr. Randolph was designated by the Texas State Board of Education as the co-recipient of the Hero for Children Award, given the first time in 1994 by the board in recognition of excellence in advocacy for Texas school children.

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Business and Education Conference will be Dec. 12

Longview News Journal
December 1997

The sixth annual East Texas Business and Education Conference hosted by Greater Longview Organization for Business and Education (GLOBE) is set to begin at 8:30 a.m. Dec. 12 at LeTourneau University.

The theme for this year's conference is "Business and Education: A Fitting Combination." Sam Zigrossi, retired director of corporate education for IBM, will be the keynote speaker, said GLOBE spokeswoman Jackie Madden.

The conference is designed to enhance communications by creating better dialogue between business and educational institutions in the region, and to build stronger partnerships between the two, Madden said.

Several members of the Longview area business and education community are scheduled to present conference sessions. These include topics on learning standards, grant writing, successful school/business partnerships and distance education.

There is a $25 registration fee that includes lunch, all sessions and material, Madden said. Credit through Region VII Education Service Center will be granted for attending for General Management Training (GNAT) and School Board Training (SAT).

Certificates will be mailed after the program noting the credits earned.

Madden said the conference is a part of GLOBE's efforts to promote excellence in education through the building of partnerships among families, schools, business and the community. Founded in 1989, GLOBE has grown to include 11 school districts serving thousands of East Texas students.

For a registration form or more information call Nancy Sawyer, GLOBE executive director, at 234-1760.

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Students Honored for Meeting Challenge

GLOBE recognizes 500 area youths

By: Keely Coghlan
Longview News-Journal
March 19, 1998

Longview High School senior Nick Lawson said he decided to take tougher academic courses as part of a challenge to himself.

"It gives us something to work toward," said Lawson, one of more than 500 East Texas students who successfully completed the coursework recommended by the Greater Longview Organization for Business and Education.

The students and their teachers were recognized at a GLOBE scholar luncheon for seniors Wednesday at Maude Cobb Convention and Activity Center.

"We've stuck with the plan since we were freshmen. Our parents are happy to see us be recognized," Lawson said.

Spring Hill High School seniors Tara Muklewicz and Valerie Prince said they took the rigorous courses, including four English and four math courses, to prepare themselves for college.

But the GLOBE program is also geared to students in the middle 50 percent of their high school classes, said Joe Randolph, co-chairman of the GLOBE scholarship committee and a Texas Eastman training manager.

The coursework will help students succeed in the business world, said Union Grove Independent School District official Gil Kalneic.

"It is in tune with the state's recommended or distinguished curriculum," Kalneic said. "It is a challenge that will help them face problems in the future."

Pine Tree ISD trustee Jim Cerrato called the program a valuable asset to students, "whether they are headed for a vocational career, college or straight into the work force."

Area eighth-graders hear a presentation about the program before they choose their high school courses, said co-chairman Beth Shepperd, Pine Tree public information director.

The program also offers part-time job opportunities only for GLOBE scholars, Shepperd said.

A student who is not planning to go to college will have higher skills if they successfully complete the curriculum," Shepperd said.

"A student may want to become a mechanic. But the manual employees have to read may be on the junior college reading level. And that mechanic will need higher algebra and pre-calculus skills and must be able to deal with computers. More jobs are requiring higher skills," she said.

Gladewater High School senior Anne Owens agreed. "Being a GLOBE scholar looks really good on a job application," she said

.Keynote speaker Doug Wood, a motivational speaker, praised students for their achievements – even as he invited them to participate in silly games.

"A child laughs 26 times a day. An adult laughs six times a day," Wood said. "I'm here to tell you, you've achieved a lot. Keep your joy and happiness. Keep your eyes ahead of you."

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